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Interview With George Carver, Senior Fellow, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University

"The U.S. Cut Its Own Throat"

Q Mr. Carver, does the return to the U.S.S.R. of Vitaly Yurchenko and other recent defectors suggest the U.S. needs to improve its handling of such cases?

A In the Yurchenko case, the CIA conveyed an image of amateurish bumbling that will be a great deterrent to future defectors. Yurchenko had every right to be horrified when he saw what he had told us revealed on TV and in newspaper headlines. The handling of his case was about as sloppily unprofessional as anything I've seen by the CIA in a long time.

I strongly suspect the Soviets made a point of reminding Yurchenko that

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his wife, son and the rest of his family were hostages to his transgressions and it was that threat that induced him to make his decision to go back.

Q How can we avoid such mistakes?

A We must learn, if we want more defectors, to keep our mouths shut about nuggets of information we gain from them. The U.S. government cut its own throat by crowing so much about what had been achieved—like children boasting in a schoolyard.

The greatest danger has been done overseas, I'm afraid, because the KGB will now send out a clear message: "If you're even thinking about defecting, forget it, because the long arm of the motherland will bring you back. Don't be so foolish as to entrust your reputation—let alone your life—to those blabbermouth amateurs in the U.S."

Q Does the CIA do enough to help defectors overcome homesickness, guilt feelings and culture shock?

A The pull of the motherland is very strong. Yurchenko appears to have followed the normal pattern of defectors—initial euphoria followed by depression. And Slavic depression can get pretty deep. Cutting yourself off from your country, your ties and your friends is not an easy thing to do. That is particularly true in the first weeks and months, when there are a lot of psychic mood swings.

The U.S. intelligence community in recent years has become mesmerized by technological means of gathering information. We've tended to forget that intelligence is, at heart, a people business. We are not as sensitive as we used to be to the needs, aspirations and concerns of individual human beings.

Q What happens to defectors who decide to return to the Soviet Union?

George Carver left the Central Intelligence Agency in 1979 after 26 years. He served two directors as deputy for national intelligence.

A The Soviet soldier who got tired of fighting in Afghanistan and briefly sought asylum in the U.S. embassy in Kabul probably has been shot already. I doubt that the merchant seaman in New Orleans will ever be seen again, either.

With Yurchenko, they will run him around on the Moscow equivalent of the Phil Donahue show and let him tell his story about what dreadful fellows these American thugs are. Once the Soviets have wrung all they want out of him, he probably will get a one-way trip to the basement at Lubyanka prison in Moscow and a bullet in the base of his skull.

Q Have these highly publicized cases given the Soviets a propaganda edge just before the Geneva summit?

A I don't really think they give the Soviets much of a propaganda advantage. But the charges of Yurchenko's having been abducted and drugged—specious as they are—are ricocheting around right at the time when Reagan will want to be complaining about Soviet human-rights violations.